

IV. Remarks

Claims 1-10 were pending in this application. Claims 1-6 are rejected and claim 7-10 are objected to. The present amendment amends claims 1, 5, and 7-10 to more particularly point out and clarify Applicants' invention. No new matter has been added by the present amendment. After this amendment, claims 1-10 will be pending.

Reconsideration of the application in view of the following remarks is respectfully requested.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claim 6 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicants regard as their invention.

Figure 1 was amended to illustrate that the left-hand recess 17 is of slightly lesser dimension compared to the right-hand recess 15, and thus the left-hand recess 17 will be provided with no freedom of movement for the left-hand mounting element as disclosed in paragraphs [0024], [0030]-[0031]. This amendment was in response to an objection that claim 6 was indefinite because the Figures did not show what is intended to be claimed by the phrase, "without a degree of freedom of movement." Accordingly, Applicants believe that the amendment to Figure 1 has cured the 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, rejection of claim 6.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-3, 5, and 6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,139,051, issued to Fujita ("Fujita"). Applicants respectfully submit that the rejections of claims 1-3, 5, and 6 are traversed.

Claim 1 recites that each of the mounting elements are connected to the steering wheel and have a portion that lies over top of an external part of the steering wheel. Support for this amendment may be found in Applicants' application at paragraphs [0022] and [0027].

Fujita discloses a steering wheel W1 comprising an annular portion R, a boss portion B, located in the center of the annular portion R, and 3 spokes S connecting the annular portion R with the boss portion B. The steering wheel W1 is composed of a steering wheel main body 21, an airbag system 30, and at least one horn-switching mechanism 40. The steering wheel main body 21 has a metal core 22 with core portions 23 and 25, which are covered by a layer of synthetic resin 26. The airbag system 30 is located on top of the boss portion B and has a top pad 34 made of synthetic resin which covers the airbag 30 and forms a continuous external surface with the layer of synthetic resin 26. *Fujita* at Col. 4, lines 28-50 and Col. 5, lines 3-16 and Figure 2. A support plate 42 is positioned underneath or behind the steering wheel's continuous external surface and is mounted to the core portion 25 at a left spoke portion metal core 25L and a right spoke portion metal core 25R. The support plate 42 mounts the airbag 30 to the steering wheel body 21. The support plate 42 includes vertical plate mounting portions 44a and base body

portions 44b. *Id.* at Col. 6, lines 3-18. The Examiner posits that the mounting elements 44a and 44b are associated with a respective spoke and have a portion overlaying part of the steering wheel. Office Action at p.4. This is however not the case. Claim 1 has been amended to clarify "overlaying" as "lies over top of an external part." As discussed above and as illustrated in Figure 2, the mounting and base body portions 44a and 44b are part of the support plate 42 which is positioned underneath or behind the continuous external surface of the steering wheel formed by the layer of synthetic resin 26 and the top pad 34. Accordingly, portions 44a and 44b do not lie over top of an external part of the steering wheel W1.

This is unlike Applicants' invention as recited in claim 1, where each of the mounting elements has a portion that lies over top of an external part of the steering wheel. In that Fujita lacks the noted element of claim 1, the rejection based thereon should be withdrawn. Accordingly, Applicants believe claim 1 and its dependent claims 2-3, 5, and 6 are in a condition for allowance.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claim 4 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Fujita in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,600,114, issued to Kikuta ("Kikuta"). Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of claim 4 is traversed.

Since claim 4 depends on claim 1 and since Kikuta fails to disclose mounting elements that lie over top of an external part of the steering wheel, Fujita and Kikuta cannot render the claim of the present invention as obvious.

The rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is therefore improper and should be withdrawn.

Conclusion

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the present form of the claims are patentably distinguishable over the art of record and that this application is now in condition for allowance. Such action is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date

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